

OCOASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 18, 2025

BERKELEY WATERFRONT IMPROVEMENTS

Project No. 23-006-01
Project Manager: Mark Kalnins

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and possible authorization to amend the Conservancy's previously authorized project award to the City of Berkeley to modify the project by cancelling the Cesar Chavez Park perimeter trail improvements, adding pier and parking lot improvements, and adding preparation of plans for improving a San Francisco Bay Trail segment at the City of Berkeley Waterfront, in Alameda County, and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Berkeley Waterfront, City of Berkeley (Alameda County)

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [April 6, 2023 Staff Recommendation for Berkeley Waterfront Improvements](#)
- Exhibit 3: [November 21, 2024 Staff Recommendation for Berkeley Waterfront Improvements SF Bay Trail Planning Augmentation](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Project Concept Level Site Plans](#)
- Exhibit 5: [Project Site Photographs](#)
- Exhibit 6: [City of Berkeley Memorandum regarding financial planning for long-term maintenance of marina dredge depths and dock replacement.](#)
- Exhibit 7: [Bay Trail Extension To The Berkeley Marina – Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration – November 2003](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes staff to amend the Conservancy's previously authorized project award to the City of Berkeley to amend the project by cancelling Cesar Chavez Park perimeter trail improvements, adding pier and parking lot improvements, and adding preparation of plans for improving a San Francisco Bay Trail segment at the Berkeley Waterfront, in Alameda County. The term "project" refers to this project's grant amendment. Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. City Council approval to accept the grant agreement amendment to revise the agreement's scope of work.
2. A detailed revised work program, schedule, and budget.
3. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Bay Trail Extension to the Berkeley Marina Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted by the City of Berkeley on January 27, 2004, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 7. The Conservancy finds that the proposed project as designed and mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a less-than-significant level, and that there is no substantial evidence based on the record as a whole that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize staff to amend the Conservancy's previously authorized project award to the City of Berkeley ("City") to modify the project by cancelling Cesar Chavez Park perimeter trail improvements, adding pier and parking lot improvements, and adding preparation of plans for a San Francisco Bay Trail ("Bay Trail") segment at the Berkeley Waterfront (Exhibit 1). For reasons described below, the City is no longer able to proceed with Cesar Chavez Park trail improvements, originally authorized by the Conservancy on April 6, 2023 (Exhibit 2).

On April 6, 2023, the Conservancy authorized two grants totaling \$3,049,000 to the City of Berkeley to construct waterfront improvements, including renovation of the South Cove West Parking Lot and repairs of the Cesar Chavez Park perimeter trail (Exhibit 2). The total authorization amount was increased to \$3,655,733.49 following augmentations in 2024 to reflect updated construction bids and to support planning for 0.38-mile of new Bay Trail along Marina Boulevard that will improve trail connectivity within the Waterfront area (Exhibit 3). Construction of the South Cove West Parking Lot improvements is scheduled to begin in August 2025 and Marina Blvd. Bay Trail planning is ongoing.

Cesar Chavez Perimeter Trail Improvements - cancelled due to environmental compliance issues

On June 5, 2025, the Berkeley City Council received a briefing from City staff regarding landfill closure monitoring requirements at Cesar Chavez Park. The briefing provided updates regarding environmental compliance issues associated with the former landfill's post-closure requirements that include a location where perimeter trail improvements were being planned. City Council directed staff to pause the Cesar Chavez Park perimeter trail improvements for an unknown period due to the compliance issues. To date, the City of Berkeley has spent \$299,706.38 on perimeter trail improvement work. City staff prepared final construction plans and specifications and concluded bid review and contractor selection prior to receiving notice that the trail improvements were to be suspended. The subject authorization will allow Conservancy staff to amend the City's grant agreement to redirect remaining funding from the perimeter trail toward improvements at the Recreation Gateway Pier, J & K Parking Lot, and planning for a new section of San Francisco Bay Trail. The planned improvements are described below and are not in areas affected by the ongoing environmental compliance issues described above. Project plans are provided in Exhibit 4 and Site Photographs are provided in Exhibit 5.

Recreation Gateway Pier and J & K Parking Lot Improvements

The Recreation Gateway Pier (formerly, Old Pier Wharf) is an above-water platform at the inner harbor of the Berkeley Marina that was constructed in the 1930s to support a warehouse. In 1969, the existing pier went through an upgrade where the timber decking was replaced with concrete panels along with deck lighting and a handrail system. Since then, it has served as an open space to support unprogrammed recreation for the community. A structural assessment performed in 2023 identified the need for structural repairs to support enhanced recreational use of pier. The recreation enhancements planned for the Pier include construction of a pickleball court, a half-court basketball area, children's bike area, exercise equipment area, table tennis, and a bean bag toss court.

The Docks J & K Parking Lot, just south of the Recreation Gateway Pier, was originally constructed over 60 years ago. The 85 parking spaces support access to: 1) the open space at the Recreation Gateway Pier, 2) the inner harbor trail loop, 3) approximately 45 slips at Dock-K where public users access the recreation charter fishing boats and small-scale commuter ferry, 4) Dock-J with over 150 slips, 5) the Waterfront Harbormaster Office, 6) a nearby bait shop, restaurants, and businesses, and 7) an electric vehicle charging station. The lot is in poor condition with major cracks, uneven pavement, poor striping and traffic marking, and potholes.

This public resource that provides access to the waters of San Francisco Bay is in desperate need of renovation.

The proposed pier and parking lot improvement work includes: community engagement, preparation of final designs, obtaining permits, and construction. The pier construction will include the above ground recreation components described above along with pier deck surfacing and pier structural repairs. The Dock J & K parking lot improvements include asphalt overlay throughout the 1.2-acre parking lot, installation of safety features including new traffic islands, wheel stops, safety striping, safety signage, and reconstructing the trash enclosure.

San Francisco Bay Trail Extension planning – Shorebird Park Segment

The proposed project will also prepare plans for improvement of an existing degraded and poorly-surfaced trail that is located between the entrance of Adventure Playground at South Cove and the 199 Seawall Drive Parking Lot of the Berkeley Waterfront (Exhibit 1).

This segment of the trail currently provides public access to the following popular recreation amenities:

- Adventure Playground (65,000 visits per year);
- Shorebird Park Playground;
- Shorebird Nature Center (offers science, nature field trips, and interpretive programs for kindergarten - 8th grade led by City naturalists and volunteers);
- Public restrooms; and
- Shorebird Park including 5 group picnic sites, Shorebird Beach, and an amphitheater stage.

The improved trail will increase access to the Berkeley Pier where a Ferry terminal is currently being planned.

The trail segment was originally constructed over 40 years ago and does not meet the latest San Francisco Bay Trail standards due its width and lack of 2-foot shoulders. The trail surface has reached its useful life and various pavement structural failures are visible.

This project element includes community engagement, preparation of designs, and obtaining permits and the appropriate level of CEQA documentation. The trail design will meet Bay Trail standards, ADA requirements, and will be consistent with the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's (BCDC's) public access guidelines.

Site Description:

The project area, shown in Exhibit 1, is comprised of the Berkeley Marina, adjoining trail systems, and associated infrastructure, such as non-profit sailing clubs and commercial developments that ring the marina. The Berkeley Waterfront gets up to 300,000 visitors per year. This area provides impressive scenic coastal views and recreational activities and is considered one of the best shoreline access points in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Docks J & K Parking Lot and the Recreation Gateway Pier are City-owned facilities on state tidelands located on the north side of University Ave at the Berkeley Waterfront.

The proposed Bay Trail extension is located along the southern shoreline of the waterfront, between the entrance of Adventure Playground at South Cove and the 199 Seawall Drive Parking Lot.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

The City of Berkeley's Department of Parks and Recreation maintains and enhances the quality of life in Alameda County by providing parks and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. The City has an established program for managing the Berkeley Waterfront and has expended considerable funds and grants to study and improve infrastructure. The City has successfully managed several grants from the Conservancy and other state agencies in the past.

Working with the public, regulatory, and funding partners over the past 30 years, the City has completed several water-based capital projects using \$36 million in State-funded marina improvement loans, including dock systems and shoreline revetment projects. Similarly, the City has completed several projects at the Berkeley Waterfront using Conservancy grants for planning, design, and implementation, including a 0.5-mile San Francisco Bay Trail extension in 2014, South Cove East Parking Lot renovations in 2018, 600-foot San Francisco Bay Trail extension to the sailing clubs in 2020, and installation of a new ADA-accessible gangway at the South Cove Sailing Basin in 2020. The City has a comprehensive financial system and experienced finance and auditing staff to manage the accounting and auditing of all capital projects. The City contracts with an independent auditor to perform an audit of all federally funded capital projects (a single audit) on a yearly basis. Lastly, the City of Berkeley has a plan for long-term management, maintenance, and monitoring of the project elements.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed project will enhance access to and improve the overall user experience at the Berkeley Waterfront. This extremely popular park and waterfront complex serves both local users and large groups from throughout the Bay Area during special events throughout the year. Enhancement of the parking lots, recreation pier, and Bay Trail segments will create a more inviting aesthetic and will improve safety for visitors that is expected to increase the public's use of the Berkeley Waterfront and its park amenities. The proposed project will further the State's "Outdoors For All" initiative, which seeks to equitably expand outdoor access for all Californians through focused investments in open space infrastructure, outdoor programming, and improvements to state systems.

3. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

The renovations for the parking lots, recreation pier, and Bay Trail extensions will be designed to be resilient to sea level rise and will utilize sustainable, durable materials that will effectively lengthen the serviceable lifetime of these park amenities. The proposed project will be managed by the City of Berkeley Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department, which oversees the upkeep, maintenance, and capital repair of City assets, including parks and pathways, playgrounds, gardens, landscaping, bio-swales, irrigation systems, park buildings, and parking lots.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

In addition to the multiple sustainability benefits described Exhibit 2 related to the South Cove Park lot (Project Selection criteria), the proposed J & K parking lot improvements will further enhance park users' experience by improving degraded infrastructure and increasing safety. There are currently no other active recreational amenities within the Berkeley Waterfront such as those envisioned for the recreation pier, and the pier improvements will therefore greatly enhance the user experience at the Berkeley Waterfront. Furthermore, the planned trail improvements will expand equitable access to the Bay shoreline by creating an ADA compliant trail within proximity to safe, secure and accessible parking.

5. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

The project will include a community engagement process that complements the City's extensive park planning and community engagement efforts over the years. Conceptual designs for the pier and J & K parking lots will be presented to BCDC staff at a planned coordination meeting in late 2025. Input on the conceptual designs will also be solicited from the City's Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission. Once project funding is secured, a series of community engagement meetings will be conducted to seek input from Berkeley Marina slip holders, sports groups and the general community prior to initiating the final design phase. The City received excellent feedback from the public when the first three segments of the Bay Trail extension projects within the Berkeley Waterfront were implemented from 2014 to 2019, and the public continues to share their excitement for new trail and park improvements.

Furthermore, the City's community engagement regarding the future of the Waterfront area is ongoing. As part of the Berkeley Marina Area Specific Plan Project, the City has embarked on a three-year planning effort to provide a path for achieving a financially self-sustainable, publicly owned marina that preserves and enhances infrastructure to support current and future community needs in the marina area, including the South Cove. Planning includes extensive community engagement and participation and will provide several opportunities for public review and comment on the City's proposed improvements, and programming and prioritization of new projects.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (after augmentations)	\$3,655,733
South Cove West Parking Lot - \$1,270,733	
SF Bay Trail Extension (Marina Blvd.) - \$385,000	
Cesar Chavez Park Pathway (spent to date) - \$299,706	
J & K Parking Lot, Recreation Gateway Pier and SF Bay Trail Extension (Shorebird Park) - \$1,700,294	
City of Berkeley (Other Funding)	\$338,106
South Cove West Parking Lot - \$98,400	
SF Bay Trail Extension (Marina Blvd.) - \$239,706.38	
Project Total	\$3,993,840

The funding source is a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation of \$15 million dollars from the General Fund to the Conservancy specifically for City of Berkeley marina and pier projects. (The Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 179, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022). See Exhibit 2 for a discussion of the fund source and consistency of the project with the allowable uses of those funds. The total Conservancy funding includes the original 2023 Board Authorization amount and 2024 augmentations; this authorization will not increase the amount of the grant. As a project that consists of upgrades to Berkeley Marina area facilities, the proposed amendments are consistent with this funding source.

In addition to funding the Berkeley Waterfront Improvements, the funding source also funded Berkeley Marina Improvements, including dredging of the marina entrance channel and basin, and replacement of Docks D&E. The Conservancy's authorization of marina and dock improvements using this fund source included a requirement for City staff to provide a financial plan in early 2025 for maintaining the dredge depths and dock improvements. The City has provided a memorandum to update the Conservancy regarding the long-term financial plan for maintenance, which is included as Exhibit 6.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165 regarding San Francisco Bay Area projects.

Section 31162(a) authorizes grants within the nine-county Bay Area that achieve the goals of the Bay Area Conservancy program, including improving public access to the Bay through completion of local trails which are part of a regional trail. The proposed authorization is consistent with Section 31162(a) because the proposed project is located within the nine-county Bay Area, and it will help achieve the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program goal of improving public access to and around the Bay through completion of a local trail that connects to population centers and public facilities, which are part of a regional trail system

(i.e., the San Francisco Bay Trail). The proposed authorization will also provide accessible parking and a safe, secure staging area for Bay Trail users.

Section 31162(d) authorizes grants that promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes. Consistent with this section, this project will accomplish preliminary work for a trail and waterside pier that provides unique urban recreation open space.

Section 31163(c) requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that are supported by adopted local plans, are multijurisdictional or regional, can be implemented in a timely way, and provide benefits that would be lost if the project is not quickly implemented. The proposed project is consistent with Section 31163(c), for the following reasons:

The proposed project will complete a portion of a trail system that provides safe and equitable recreation, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and recreation resources consistent with adopted local and regional plans, including the City of Berkeley 2002 General Plan, and BCDC's San Francisco Bay Plan, wherein the entire Berkeley Waterfront has been designated as a key public access area to the Bay. The proposed project will facilitate continued public access amenities to a diverse public who reside in the City of Berkeley and communities abutting the waterfront area, as well as historically marginalized communities from throughout the Bay Area.

In addition, the proposed project can be implemented in a timely manner, with completion of the proposed improvements and trail planning in 2028. The proposed project provides benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, as there is current momentum built from the early planning and conceptual design work already undertaken by the City.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, and **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will plan, design, and apply for permits for a new Bay Trail section at Shorebird Park and provide active recreation amenities including play features at the Gateway Recreation Pier.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Recreation Gateway Pier and J & K Parking Lot Improvements

Authorizing the project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 19, Section 15301, which exempts the repair, maintenance, and minor alteration of existing facilities. Subsection C provides that examples of public facilities eligible for this exemption include existing highways, streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities (this includes road grading for the purpose of public safety). Consistent with this section, the pier and parking lot improvement element of this project would repair, maintain, and construct minor alterations to existing facilities, which are paved areas similar to the examples provided in the section.

Shorebird Park Bay Trail

On January 27, 2004, the City of Berkeley approved the Bay Trail Extension to the Berkeley Marina project and notified the public regarding availability of the project's Mitigated Negative Declaration / Initial Study (IS/MND; State Clearinghouse Number: 2003092068). The IS/MND addresses the environmental impacts of a spur of the Bay Trail to improve bicycle and pedestrian access to the Berkeley Marina. Pursuant to Section 15085 of the CEQA Guidelines, the City of Berkeley submitted a Notice of Determination (NOD) for the proposed IS/MND to the California State Clearinghouse (SCH) on February 5, 2004. The Draft IS/MND was made available for public review at 2180 Milvia St., Berkeley, CA 94704.

The IS/MND included a Mitigation Monitoring Reporting Program (Appendix A to MND in Exhibit 7) which addresses the potential impacts of the proposed improvements. The IS/MND identified potentially significant environmental resources listed below without mitigation. Mitigation measures were adopted to assure that these potential impacts are avoided or reduced to less-than-significant levels, as summarized below:

Aesthetics: The proposed project could result in the removal of trees greater than 6 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh). Indigenous and specimen trees will not be removed. Trees greater than 6 inches dbh that are removed shall be replaced at a ratio of 4:1.

Air Quality: Dust and exhaust generated during construction would be short term but potentially significant. A grading plan shall be developed for the project that will include best management practices that limit impacts (e.g., watering soils during dry periods). Construction-related emissions are short-term in duration, but may still cause adverse air quality impacts. During the construction phase of the project, small amounts of air emissions would be produced. Emissions during construction would also be short-term.

Biological Resources: The project has the potential to impact nesting and wintering habitat for burrowing owls. Preconstruction surveys for owls will be conducted prior to construction. If owls are located in close proximity to construction, a buffer zone will be established around nests where no construction can occur until the owl has left the site or construction may be delayed to accordance with California Department of Fish and Wildlife protocols. Adequate measures shall be taken to avoid inadvertent take of bird nests protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and State Fish and Game Code when in active use.

Cultural Resources: Bay Trail improvements are located on bay fill and have no potential to affect unique paleontological or archaeological resources. If any construction contractors discover prehistoric archaeological deposits that include human remains during excavation for the proposed project, appropriate notifications shall be required.

Geology and Soils: Surface conditions throughout the project area have been considered by the design team to evaluate the potential for soil loss by erosion and to develop means (by grading, structural measures and/or other improvements) to control erosion. Similarly, the design takes into consideration maintenance necessary because

of soil settlement. In areas where minor amounts of subsidence occurs, routine maintenance would be performed to correct any localized areas of differential settlement.

Hydrology and Water Quality: Project construction could potentially affect surface water quality through erosion. Mitigation provided for Geology and Soils would reduce risks to a less than significant levels. Similarly, construction could potentially alter drainage patterns, though construction activities would be temporary in duration and mitigation provided for Geology and Soils would reduce risks to less than significant levels.

Land Use and Planning: Some land use plans, policies and regulations would require approvals or permits for the proposed project. The City shall obtain all necessary approvals prior to construction of the Bay Trail.

Transportation/Traffic: Certain areas of the Bay Trail Extension will involve multiple use intersections, such as at the entrance around Hs. Lordships. There is a risk of bicyclists or rollerbladers endangering pedestrians crossing the trail to enter Hs. Lordships or Skates restaurants. Impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels by the inclusion of safety signs and pavement markings indicating a multi-use intersection.

Staff has independently evaluated the “Bay Trail Extension to The Berkeley Marina – Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration – November 2003,” and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) adopted by the City of Berkeley on February 5, 2004, and concurs that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project will have a significant effect on the environment. Staff therefore recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as mitigated avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment as that term is defined by 14 Cal. Code Regs. §15382.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Determination for the Bay Trail improvements and a Notice of Exemption for the pier and parking lot improvements.